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Buddhism 101: Spreading the word

By Susan Orr (Contact)
Saturday, April 26, 2008

On an April evening at the University of Southern Indiana, classes are taking place in rooms around campus.

In a classroom in the basement of Rice Library, some 30 students are listening as a monk in a brown robe explains the fundamentals of Buddhism.

Tonight's lesson includes an explanation of karma. Thich Hang Dat's words, spoken with a strong Vietnamese accent, are often both simple and profound.

Buddhism describes a number of types of karma, but in essence karma means this: All actions have consequences.

If you lie to people, Dat says, you'll be mistrusted. If you treat others badly, you'll be disliked.

"If we want to look into the future, look at what we are doing now," Dat tells the group.

"When we have the proper understanding of karma, we would be careful of what we say, careful of what we do."

Buddhism was founded in the sixth century B.C. by an Indian man born as Siddhartha Gautama (later known as the Buddha). Buddhism teaches that life involves suffering, but one can overcome suffering by letting go of attachments and following the Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right concentration and right mindfulness.

As a Buddhist, Dat is part of a tiny minority in the United States: According to The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's recently released U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, only 0.7 percent of American adults self-identify as Buddhists.

But Dat is making his presence known in this region.

He lives at Ten Thousand Buddhas Summit Monastery, a Buddhist center he founded in Corydon, Ind., several years ago. He's also teaching introductory Buddhism classes at four schools this semester: USI, Indiana University-Southeast in New Albany, and Bellarmine University and the University of Louisville's Shelby Campus, both in Louisville, Ky.

Dat's path to Southern Indiana included a lot of stops



Serge Giachetti / Courier & Press Buddhist monk Thich Hang Dat teaches an introductory class on Buddhism at the University of Southern Indiana. Thirty-two students are enrolled in this semester's class. Dat, originally from Vietnam, runs monasteries in Corydon, Ind., and Louisville, Ky.



Thich Hang Dat teaches about reincarnation and the cycle of Samsara to students in his introductory class on Buddhism.

Buddhism Events

Buddhist monk Thich Hang Dat plans to teach Buddhism again at the University of Southern Indiana next fall. Dates and other details have not yet been set, but three classes are planned: Introduction to Buddhism 1, Introduction to Buddhism 2 and Meditation 101. The noncredit courses are part of USI's Extended Services program. Call 464-1989 or (800) 467-8600.

Mindful Heart Buddha Sangha, 600 N. Weinbach Ave., Suite 960, holds meditation sessions at noon Wednesdays, 4 p.m. Saturdays, and 6 p.m. Thursdays and Sundays. Sessions are open to visitors, including beginners. Mindful Heart also offers occasional introductory and intermediate classes on

along the way.

He came to the United States as a teenager in the 1980s, and in 1990 he graduated from Penn State University with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. After that he moved to Ukiah, Calif., where he earned a master's degree in Buddhist studies from Dharma Realm Buddhist University and became a monk.

He then studied in India and Los Angeles, but found the hubbub of urban life didn't agree with him.

"I am not a city monk," Dat said.

Intending to establish a monastery in a more rural area, he checked out upstate South Carolina at the invitation of someone he knew. He spent a few months there and looked at more than 100 properties, but didn't find what he was looking for.

"The energy was not matching, so I could not stay there," he said.

Other people he knew suggested he look in the Kentucky/Indiana area. He came, liked what he saw, and purchased 80 acres in Corydon in 2001.

His monastery hosts weekly meditation sessions, monthly retreats and special celebrations several times a year. In March 2006, Dat opened a satellite center in Louisville which offers after-school programming, food relief and other activities.

This is the second time Dat has taught the class at USI. At 32 students, this semester's enrollment is more than double that of the first class.

Most of the students in this semester's class, Dat said, had some previous knowledge of Buddhism.

But he could not say whether interest in Buddhism is growing in this area.

"I hope so. I don't know. I don't know how to make that kind of judgment," Dat said.

Students in the noncredit course said they were drawn to the class for a variety of reasons.

Alan and Marie-Paule Marty of Newburgh became interested in Buddhism through their travels to Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Borneo and Japan.

"We have suitcases full of literature, and it's usually filled with so many foreign terms that you kind of get bogged down," Alan Marty said.

Alan Marty, who attends the Unitarian Universalist Church of Evansville, said he sees similarities between Buddhism and Christian teachings. Both, he said, teach followers to treat others with kindness.

"There's all these parallels with Christianity and the moral life," he said.

Beth Franklin of Newburgh said she signed up for the class because she is a spiritual seeker.

"I don't believe there's just one way. I sort of believe it all, in a way," she said.

Franklin also holds a master's degree in counseling and has participated in 12-step recovery programs. Buddhism, she said, shares some ideas with both psychology and with addiction recovery. All three, she said, emphasize focusing on the present and being responsible for one's thoughts and actions.

"I think that's probably why Buddhism, at least on the surface," appeals to me," she said.

"I'm thrilled the classes are offered."

Buddhism. Classes are planned for next fall and winter, with dates to be announced.

The Sangha will have a retreat June 9-13 at Kordes Center in Ferdinand, Ind., with Buddhist monk Bhante Henepola Gunaratana. Cost is \$400 for a double room, \$475 for a single room. Participants should have meditation experience. Registration deadline: May 15. To register or for details, call 434-6643 or visit www.mindfulheartbuddhasangha.com

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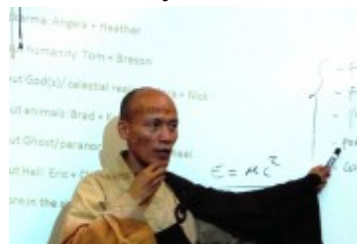


(https://iushorizon.com/staff_name/ashley-sizemore/) September 23, 2013

Adjunct professor shares message and mindset

IU Southeast strives to give students a worldly education, offering a variety of classes with professors from numerous backgrounds. Last semester, the university welcomed a Buddhist monk to the community.

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Thich Hang Dat, a native of Vietnam, is an adjunct professor of philosophy and has spoken to the campus several times about his religion.

Currently, Dat is teaching one course, Buddhism (REL-354), to 21 students.

One of these students, Tom Bush, philosophy senior, said he enjoys learning from Dat.

“I think it’s really cool to have someone from a different background to expand and learn from,” Bush said.

Dat said that after he came over to the U.S. he really did not have any trade skills, which led him to his spiritual path of becoming a monk.

“During my freshman year of college I decided I wanted to become a monk,” he said.

Dat earned a degree in electrical engineering from Pennsylvania State University in 1990. In 1991, he began his life’s journey as a monk. Dat continued his studies at University of the West in Rosemead, Calif. where he received a Masters of Arts in religious studies in 1999.

When the Dalai Lama visited Louisville in May to do a three-day teaching, he was received by Dat, Louisville mayor Greg Fischer and two other monks. During the teachings, Dat sat on the stage and translated for the Vietnamese people.

“I was an emcee and a translator for the Vietnamese people,” Dat said. “I ran the program.”



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Monks traveled from all over the U.S. to come to the event. Dat said there were 40 to 50 monks from out of state and some that had traveled from California.

Although not the first time Dat had met the Dalai Lama, he said it was an experience.

“He is a highly respected person,” Dat said. “Of course it is an honor to see him in person. He is like our Buddhist pope.”

Dat has started religious centers in Louisville, Corydon, St. Louis, Mo., and Atlantic City, N.J. These centers were started so that the local Buddhist people could pray and meditate. He travels to all of the centers twice a year, but said he spends most of his time at the Corydon center meditating and teaching other monks.

“When people came to do an article about me in Atlantic City, did an interview about me they called me the ‘Traveling Monk,’” Dat said.

On the weekends, Dat said he spends time at his Louisville center and often leads other monks in meditation.

Dat said there is not a favorite place that he likes to visit when he goes on trips to talk about Buddhism. To him they are all the same, they just differ by environments. His only concern is if he is able to assist others spiritually and through mediation.

“The only thing is whether I can contribute to the people, to the community,” Dat said.

Dat said one reason he is a monk is because of meditation. He said he likes to help others through meditation. He aids those who are in poor health, performs weddings and does services at funerals.

Dat said a typical day for him and the other monks at the Corydon center is to wake up at 4 a.m. and do prayer and meditation for two hours. Dat teaches other monks about Buddhism until it is time for lunch. After lunch all the monks do chores for around five and a half hours. After



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monks do chores for around five and a half hours. After chores are done the monks eat dinner and have another prayer with meditation.

Some of the monks from Dat's center in Corydon travel with Dat to IU Southeast and sit in on his class.

"They listen to my lecture in the classroom so they can learn how to talk with local people later on," Dat said.



(<https://iushorizon.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Dat2.jpg>) "Dat is highly respected by the Vietnamese Buddhist community in Louisville," Hughes, associate librarian said. "I admire that he wants to instill the tradition in children in the community."

In addition to teaching at IU Southeast, Dat is continuing his religious studies at University of the West and is a candidate for his Ph.D.

He has taught at the University of Louisville, Bellerme University, and University of Southern Indiana.

Student Angela Tolbert, English junior, said she likes the atmosphere of Dat's class.

"It's a more relaxed environment, not a lot of stress," she said. "We get a deeper understanding of Buddhism."

Next semester Dat will teach Mindfulness in Meditation as an honors course. He said he hopes to teach students how meditation can be used to control their stress and anxieties.

"Hopefully I can work with the school and enhance the student life spiritually and mentally by applying



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...and the opportunity and money by applying meditation,” Dat said. “Mindfulness is for everyone; meditation is for everyone. It’s not just for the Buddhist.”

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